

**HOW TO STEAL
AN ELECTION**

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**WHAT DOES THE
LORD REQUIRE OF
WHITE WOMEN?**

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SOJOURNERS

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the Riverside

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**FRONTLINE CHURCHES
AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS:
THREE STORIES OF RESILIENCE AND HOPE**
by Avery Davis Lamb

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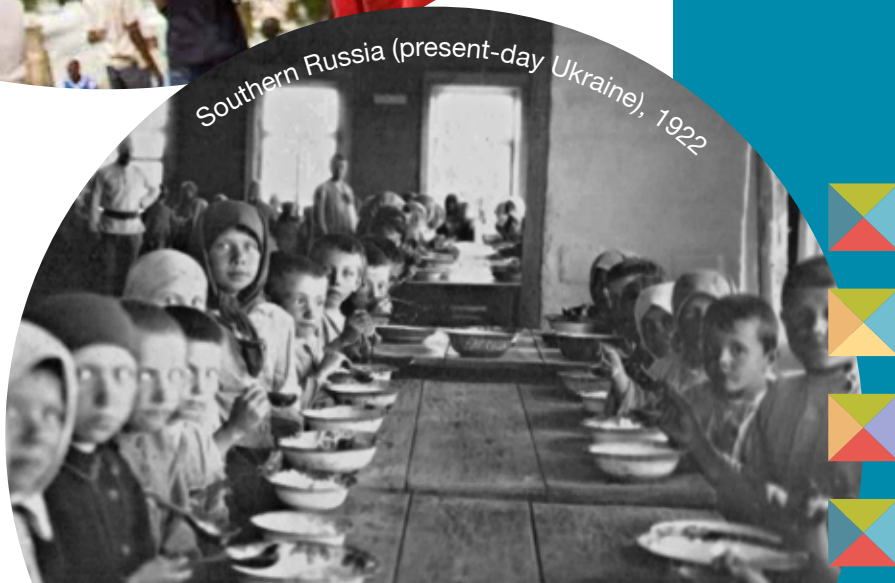
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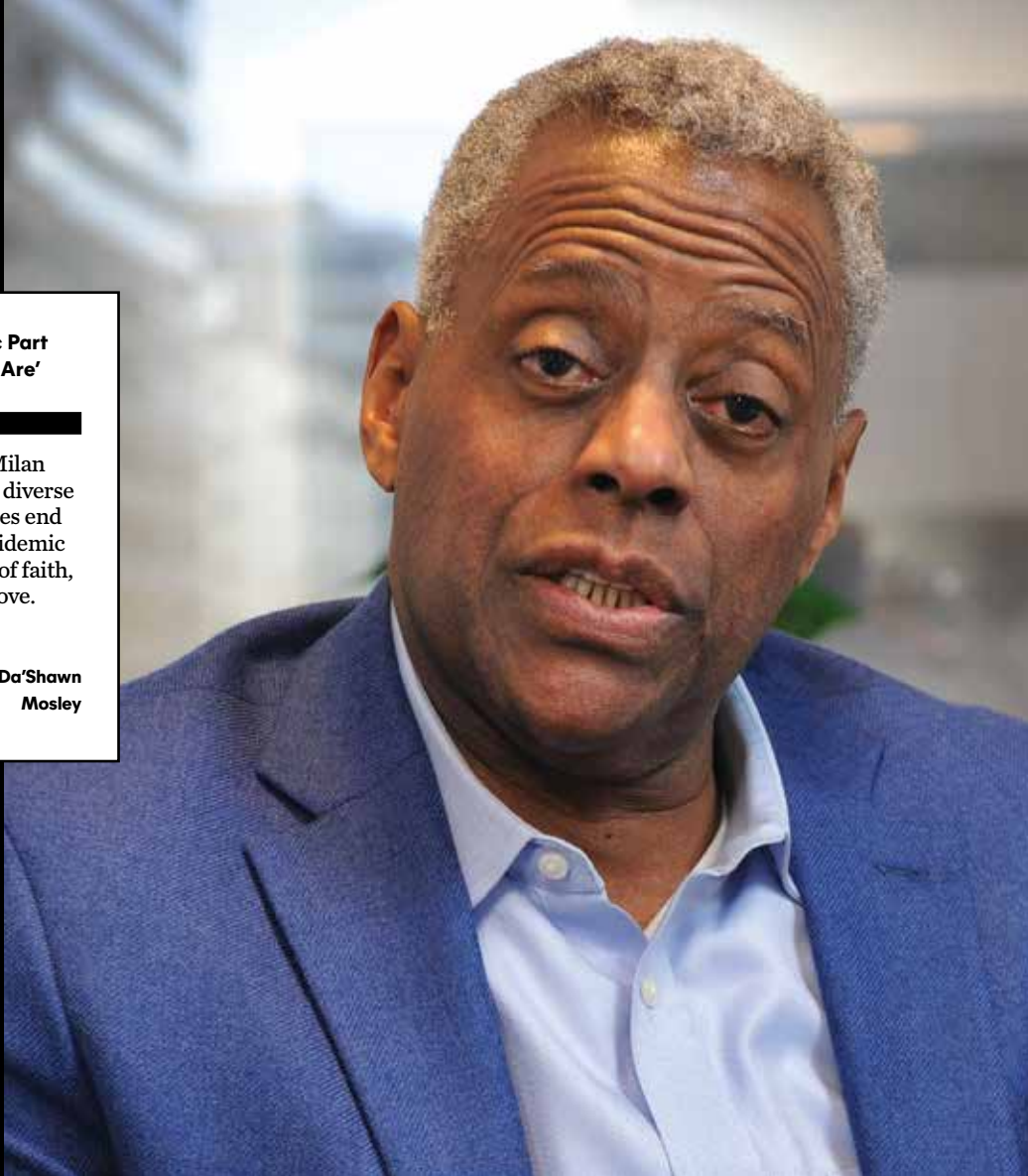
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**'An Organic Part
of Who We Are'**

For Jesse Milan Jr., helping diverse communities end the HIV epidemic is a matter of faith, hope, and love.

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Mosley



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My History Is Not a Metaphor In church we sing songs about wandering, written by people whose ancestors rendered others homeless.

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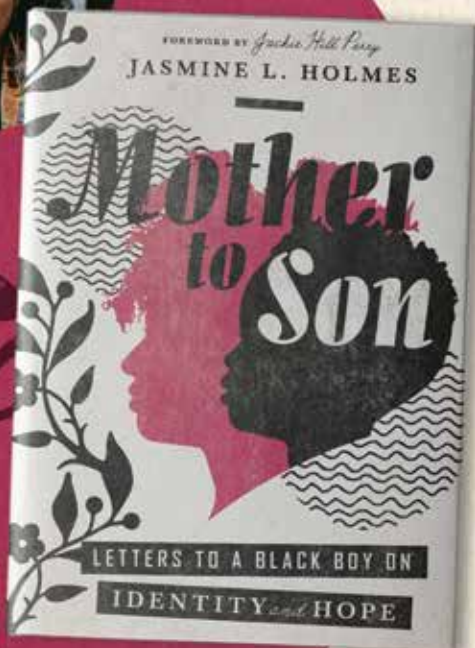
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*"Dear Son, you are black.
And it is good."
Love, Mama*

**12 LOVE LETTERS
ON FAITH, IDENTITY, AND
GROWING UP BLACK**



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From the Editor

Earlier this year, President Trump dubiously proclaimed that he was committed to “conserving the majesty of God’s creation”—even while his administration continued to strip protections for clean air and water and double down on actions that will accelerate climate collapse. Clean-water activist Mari Copeny, below, who pointed to the dangerous lead levels in the water of hundreds of U.S. cities, rising asthma rates, and the lack of regulations on hazardous chemicals, offered an unambiguous response to Trump: “please stop lying to the world.”

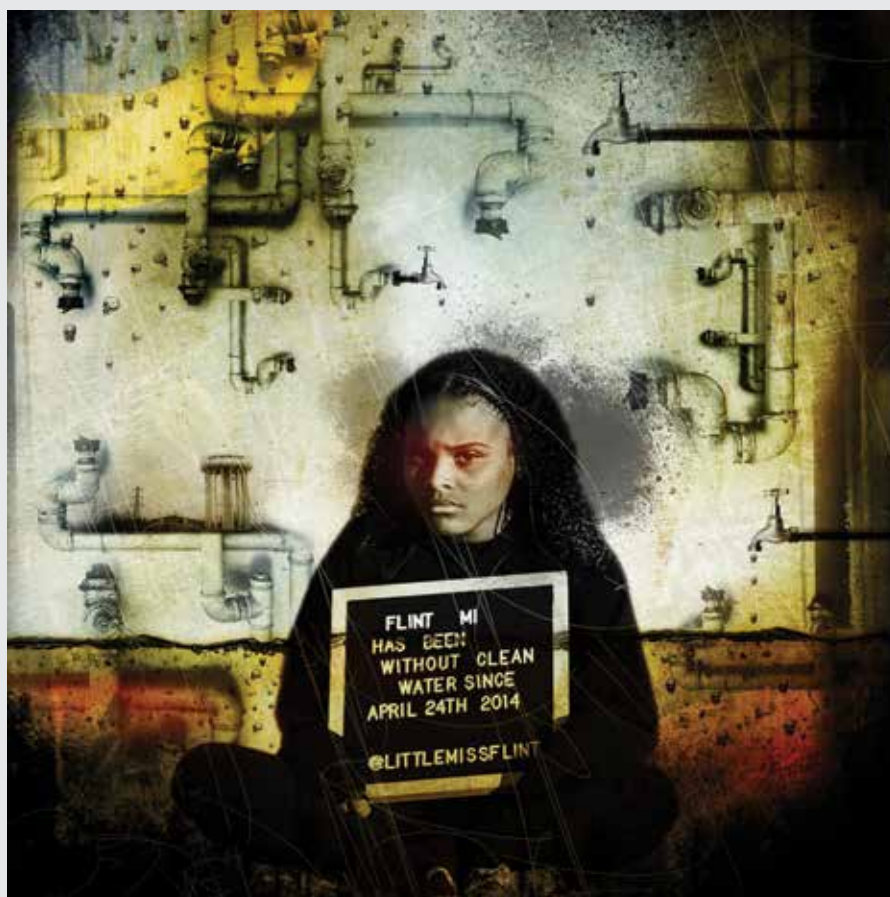
The 12-year-old Copeny, aka “Little Miss Flint,” has a way of cutting through the chaos and offering clear perspective. (After the Super Bowl, she tweeted: “Hey. Can I get the same amount of outrage over America’s lack of clean water as some of ya’ll have over the Super Bowl halftime performance, please.”) “Isaiah 11:6 leaders” like Copeny, 13-year-old gun control activist Naomi Wadler, Greta Thunberg, and so many others offer what we desperately need right now: Hope for a different kind of future. As Copeny put it this winter: “Hey adults. Can you please stop acting like toddlers. —Signed, the kids of America.”

RESPONSE

Reduce, Reuse, Respond

David Garen described Sasha Adkins’ February 2020 cover story, “Plastic and the State of Our Souls,” as an “incisive look at the deleterious physical and spiritual aspects of the technology of plastics.” He noted how other things follow “this same pattern, something at first seen as being convenient and useful turns out to have huge drawbacks. We need to look at everything we purchase and do in our lives through this self-reflective and spiritual lens and then respond by making changes to our habits and lifestyles.” Kathleen Bradley agreed, citing her own commitment to “never use or buy plastics of any kind” and instead opt for reusable materials: “Thank you for bringing God into your picture—so important.”

Write us: response@sojo.net



"I FIRMLY
BELIEVE
THAT OUR
SALVATION
DEPENDS
ON THE
POOR."

Dorothy Day

Co-founder, the Catholic Worker movement

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Lisa Sharon Harper

"Storytelling is at the heart of narrative reconciliation," says Lisa Sharon Harper. "The work of my life is to help change the story of America" (p.16). Inspired by the lives of Fannie Lou Hamer, Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Tubman, Harper has dedicated her career to "bearing witness to the places where racial and gender hierarchy broke the world" as the founder and president of consulting group Freedom Road and as an author, speaker, artist, and organizer.



Patty Krawec

Resistance comes in many forms, says Patty Krawec (p.32), an Anishnaabe activist and cohost of the podcast *Medicine for the Resistance*. She is in a drum group, teaches sewing, and coordinates sunrise ceremonies for the water. "The Anishnaabe traditions talk about ... coming together to form a new people; our ceremonies offer ways to develop relationships with this place and with each other," she says. "My activism is about creating community, creating home, and pushing back against capitalism and colonialism."

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30
million

Number of oysters restored to reefs in the New York Harbor to soften the impact of large waves and reduce flooding and erosion

39%

Reduction in global flooding each year attributed to mangrove trees

330,000
gallons

Amount of stormwater a single acre of wetland can absorb



1

HEARTS & MINDS

BY JIM WALLIS

OUR LAST, BEST CHANCE?

We're living in a fearful time, and 2020 has thus far served to amplify and validate many of our fears about the future of the nation, our faith, and the world. What's at stake this year is perhaps a last chance to decisively reject the overt white nationalism that we're up against, which is as bold and brazen as at any time in decades.

The racism that has been present in this land since before the founding of this nation, a nation built on the forced labor of kidnapped Africans and the displacement and genocide of Indigenous people, represents America's original sin. The history of the U.S. is one of halting, tentative steps toward repenting of that sin, juxtaposed against white people doubling down on

**"WHITE NATIONALISM
IS AS BOLD AND
BRAZEN AS AT ANY
TIME IN DECADES."**

“MY PRAYER IN THIS MOMENT IS FOR REPENTANCE ON A NATIONAL SCALE.”

racist systems, structures, and beliefs. It's important to note that repentance does not mean feeling bad or sorry but rather stopping, turning around, and going in a new direction. We are at a moment of national decision, between repentance on the one hand and active retreat from that progress on the other, meaning the reaffirmation and reinstitution of America's original sin.

Lent is traditionally a time for deep reflection, often with prayer, fasting, study, and repentance. Given the crisis we are now facing in both nation and church, such deep Lenten reflection is urgently needed. Answering the questions that Jesus asked during his ministry, as I laid out my book *Christ in Crisis*, is the best response to our current political, moral, and religious crisis. It's a response that could set us on a path toward true national repentance from America's original sin.



Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of *Sojourners* magazine.

As Michelle Alexander recently noted in *The New York Times*, there is an inextricable link between the Trump administration's policies of mass deportation and mass incarceration. They are both central strategies of the current regime and the white power structure more broadly to entrench white minority rule and prevent changes in demography from creating a true multiracial democracy. Let's be absolutely clear about what the stakes are: If most white Christians support the dangerous brand of fascism that is ascendant these days—which has always been painfully and violently present, especially for people of color—we will lose the authenticity of our faith. This movement toward fascism and white nationalism, which we see around the world, is led by one of the most effective marketers of America's worst instincts and demons, Donald Trump.

What is at stake is a test of democracy and a test of faith—the future of the nation and the future of the church. That's why my prayer in this moment is indeed for repentance on a national scale. I am asking God to help us stop the overt white nationalism that's the central strategy of a president and a political party and turn us in a new and redemptive direction.

Let's begin that this Lent with deeper prayer and regular fasting—perhaps one day a week until this fall—and asking God what repentance, turning around and going in a whole new direction, means for us in this crucial time.

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COMMENTARY

BY JONATHAN PINCKNEY AND MARIA J. STEPHAN

A WORLDWIDE WEB OF PROTEST

A robust global media quickly spreads symbols, tactics, and lessons learned—for both protesters and governments.



2

In less than two weeks in late 2019, three heads of government (in Iraq, Lebanon, and Bolivia) agreed to step down under pressure from mass protests. Earlier last year, long-standing military dictators in Sudan and Algeria were forced from power following popular uprisings.

On their own, these events are remarkable. What makes them truly extraordinary is that they came amid a worldwide protest wave from Hong Kong to Manipur to Chile that has toppled governments, led to new social policies, and challenged basic economic structures.

Authoritarian regimes are not protesters' only targets. In Chile, considered an oasis of stability in South America, protests triggered by a hike in subway fares have grown into popular demands for an end to corruption and economic inequality. And the global climate movement has used walkouts, sit-ins, and civil disobedience to dramatize the need for urgent action. In

each case, popular dissatisfaction with traditional institutional approaches has encouraged a turn to extra-institutional (and at times extra-legal) resistance.

Surprisingly, this proliferation of people-power movements has taken place amid a period of declining effectiveness for movements. While around 70 percent of major nonviolent movements in the 1990s succeeded, only around 30 percent did so from 2010 to 2017. Protests have been easier to start but more difficult to resolve. So, have the movements of 2019 broken these trends?

We link the declining rates of effectiveness and their potential reversal to the emergence of parallel global networks of protesters *and* repressive governments (both dictatorships and democracies), who use increasing access to global information to rapidly learn from one another. This means that ideas, symbols, and tactics that both help movements succeed *and* successfully suppress them spread quickly from their origins to other struggles. In the past, waves of successful protests often lasted years. What we are seeing now—and are likely to see more of in the future—are short, sharp waves of successful protests followed by short waves of failures.

Activists learning from struggles in other countries is nothing new. Martin Luther King Jr. and James Lawson studied the ideas and tactics of the Indian independence movement. Young activists who spearheaded the successful Bulldozer Revolution against Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic trained other activists who went on to lead their own successful movements in Georgia, Ukraine, and Egypt.

What's new today is the speed of this learning. In 2011, only weeks after Egyptian activists occupying Cairo's Tahrir Square forced President Hosni Mubarak from power, their tactic was being replicated in cities across the Middle East. Months later, it inspired the Occupy Wall Street movement in the U.S. Social media is often pointed to as a key factor facilitating this diffusion, but the spread is often simpler: A robust global media can easily spread symbols, tactics, and lessons learned.

But governments are learning too, at an increasingly rapid pace. In the 1980s, it took Argentina's military dictatorship years to adapt its repressive strategies in response to international outcry over the violence in neighboring Chile. In 2011, weeks after the

"AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES ARE NOT PROTESTERS' ONLY TARGETS."

beginning of the Arab Spring in Tunisia, the Syrian government had already crafted a strategy to snuff out a popular uprising at its inception.

Governments and corporations are also rapidly spreading practical tools to prevent and respond to dissent. China is a pioneer in this. Having built their own surveillance state with millions of AI-powered facial recognition cameras, Chinese companies now distribute their technology and expertise to dozens of countries, including democracies such as Germany or Denmark.

International learning networks are not the only important factor influencing protest movements' success. When taking domestic political conditions into account, some scholars find little or no significant international influence on protests at all. Our understanding of any protest movement must be deeply rooted in the specificities of its context.

And while social media and global learning networks accelerate mass mobilization, successful movements also require organization and resilience. Organizing structures, including church-based networks, affinity groups, and neighborhood committees, build the trust, relationships, and commitment necessary to sustain the struggle amid repression. And finally, structural changes take time and deep organizing, something that can be lost in the speed of modern-day protests.

Last year the world saw incredible successes for protests in difficult circumstances. Yet it is likely that this peak will be followed by a reversal as repressive governments learn from each other's failures and adapt to the new protest wave. Activists will have to be alert in maintaining the speed with which they learn from one another's successes and failures—and invest in the organization necessary to maintain their fight for a just society over the longer term. ♦

Jonathan Pinckney is program officer and **Maria J. Stephan** is director of nonviolent action at the U.S. Institute of Peace.

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Climate and Creation**

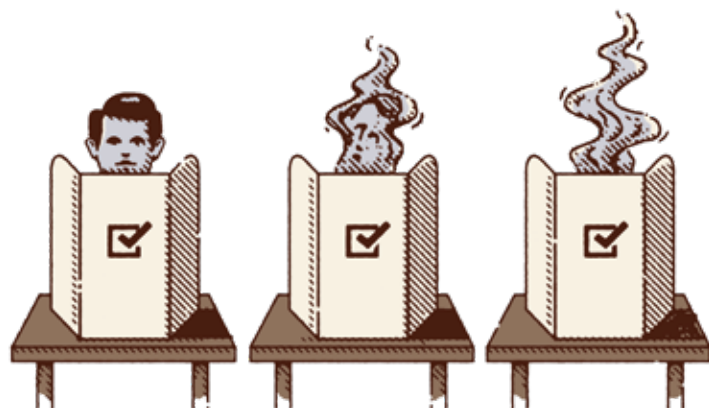
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COMMENTARY

BY MYRNA PÉREZ



AMERICA'S VANISHING VOTER

Purging names from voter registration rolls in the United States follows a disturbing pattern.

Elections are a chance for voters to throw their support behind leaders they think are going to best bring about our hopes and visions for what this country can be. But there are a lot of reasons why eligible Americans may have a hard time casting a ballot that counts. One reason is sloppy purges of the voter rolls.

Purges are a practice—often controversial—of election administrators removing or cancelling voters from registration lists in order to update state registration rolls. We all benefit from clean and accurate voter rolls, which are used by poll workers to identify who is registered to vote. There is no real dispute that people who are not eligible should be removed from the rolls. Too often, however, purge processes are shrouded in secrecy, prone to error, and vulnerable to manipulation.

Part of the reason purges are so controversial is because more voters are being purged than in the past, and there is no satisfying explanation as to why. Between 2006 and 2008, the U.S. purged about 12 million voters. Between 2016 and 2018, however, the U.S. purged about 17 million voters. That's an increase of more than 33 percent—during a time when total population growth was about 6 percent and the number of registered voters increased by 18 percent.

Another reason purges are controversial are their locations. Bat-

leground states like Ohio and Wisconsin have had recent purge flare-ups. Ohio has a practice whereby voters who miss one election are put on a track for removal from the rolls. While voters can take steps to get themselves off that track, many believe that starting the process after missing only one election is too aggressive. The U.S. Supreme Court disagreed, so Ohio continues with the practice. Wisconsin, on the other hand, is in the middle of a court dispute with an activist group suing the state because the group thinks Wisconsin is not purging voters flagged for removal quickly enough.

Additionally, states with extensive histories of racial discrimination in voting, such as Texas and Georgia, have had high-profile purge attempts. Those two are joined by other states with records of discrimination in voting so egregious that they were required to follow certain special protocols until the Supreme Court issued a controversial decision in 2013 mothballing those protective protocols, which were part of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

To put a finer point on it: Those states with the country's most problematic histories of racial discrimination in voting increased their rate of purges as soon as the Supreme Court lifted the important protections for minority voters. If purge rates in the counties that used to have those protective protocols were the same as the rates in states that never had them, then as many as 1.1 million fewer individuals would have been removed from voter rolls between 2016 and 2018.

Voters can take steps to protect themselves. The easiest way is to confirm—regularly—that your registration record is accurate and up to date. A good plan is to check 30 days before the election, a week before the election, and the day before the election. If there is a problem at any of those points in time, voters should contact their local election administrator immediately.

Voter advocates are going to be doing all we can to protect eligible voters against purges. Voters can help by checking their own registrations. This is a group effort. Our elections matter, and our ability to participate in them matters even more. ♦

Myrna Pérez is deputy director of the Democracy Program at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law and a *Sojourners* contributing editor.

O

ANOTHER NUCLEAR THREAT



On an otherwise quiet Thanksgiving weekend last year, the riverbank next to Revere Copper and Brass, the company known for making pots and pans that also made parts for nuclear weapons, collapsed into the Detroit River. The event was missed not only by many Detroiters but by most Americans, who remain largely unaware of the dangers of our crumbling former nuclear weapons sites. Michigan state agencies claimed that no radioactivity was released by the literal “fall-out”—or in this case, “fall-down”—but can they be trusted? Decades of misinformation about our nuclear weapons plants should put everyone on guard.

Work on the United States’ first atomic bomb took place at Detroit’s Revere site during World War II, and the facility continued to make uranium rods during the Cold War. During this era, intensive nuclear weapons production systematically contaminated lands surrounding such Department of Energy sites as Rocky Flats in Colorado, Pantex in Texas, and Hanford in Washington state. As we enter a new era when these now-defunct sites are either remediated or left to crumble, what do we need to know?

Water safety is only one concern. The fact that Michigan’s state agencies only found out about the spill after the Canadian side reported it should be a red flag. It took a full week for the state’s environmental agency to test the water at the Revere location, just downstream from the intake pipes for drinking water for most southeast Michigan residents. Michigan especially should be vigilant regarding water safety, with Flint residents still waiting for safe drinking water.

And why hasn’t the Environmental Protection Agency tested the Detroit River during the 30 years since Revere was

granted Superfund status? A 2011 federal study of the Revere site stated, “there is a potential for significant residual contamination outside of the period in which weapons-related production occurred.” This is only a drop in the bucket of potential hazards to communities surrounding this and other nuclear weapons sites. Hanford is now the fourth most radioactive place on earth, with the nearby Columbia River seriously contaminated even amid Hanford’s Superfund cleanup.

The failure of state health agencies to adequately test known contaminated areas in a timely manner should concern all Americans. If water sources are tainted, what about other forms of environmental contamination? Some nuclear plants sent radioactivity into the air and soil for decades. What are the ongoing health impacts of this? And how does climate change pose new risks as tons of nuclear waste remain in temporary storage around the country?

We need a federal EPA that actively monitors these defunct sites without relying on outdated tests. My newest documentary film, *Rocky Flats*, highlights these issues in the Denver area but also sheds light on the very same issues at other sites. These challenges are not relics from the past, either. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2020 includes plans to *increase*, rather than reduce, nuclear weapons production.

Decades of piling up nuclear waste, the hazards of our crumbling defunct nuclear facilities, and the production of new nuclear weapons are issues that confront us all. Nuclear weapons production contaminates air, soil, and water—then and now. What will we do to stop it? *

**“DECADES OF
MISINFORMATION
ABOUT OUR
NUCLEAR WEAPONS
PLANTS SHOULD
PUT US ON GUARD.”**

Nancy Wolfe, founder of Wherewolfe Productions, is a producer, director, writer, and editor.

WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF WHITE WOMEN?

3



Over the last six months, I've spoken with multiple white women across the country about something I am beginning to understand: why white women have, historically, made disappointing allies to women of color.

These words feel dangerous to utter. I risk alienating women I love and admire. But they must be spoken in a year when the actions and votes of white women will impact the lives of women of color and their families more so than any time since women gained suffrage. We must lean into this hard conversation—and, in the doing, place our hope in the power of the resurrection, asking brown Jesus to illuminate what an alliance with women of color will require of white women in 2020.

An early race law in the colony of Maryland, where Harriett Tubman was enslaved, mandated that any white woman who married an enslaved black man would herself become a slave until her husband died. By the antebellum era, it was established that white women could not be enslaved but that ownership of their property (including their bodies) transferred

**"WHITE PATRIARCHY'S GRASP
ON WHITE WOMEN IS NOT
SOFT: IT'S A DEATH GRIP."**

to their husbands upon marriage. They could not sue. They could not make a legal contract. And they could not vote.

White patriarchy's rule, and the ever-present threat of being shunned, gave white women incentive, when push came to shove, to choose their whiteness over their womanhood. For example, free black women spearheaded the groundbreaking effort to lead Philadelphia's Anti-Slavery Society from 1833 to 1838. But a decade later, there were no black women at Elizabeth Cady Stanton's 1848 Seneca Falls Convention. In 1913, Alice Paul coddled the sensibilities of white men and women when she instructed black suffragists to walk at the back of the procession of the very first women's march on Washington.

And, in 2018, Republican Sen. Susan Collins supported Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh, promising white women they were protected because he didn't express to her a plan to challenge *Roe v. Wade*. Her vote pushed him over the line and paved the way for Supreme Court rulings shaving away civil rights protections for people of color.

I used to think of white women as kept, put on a pedestal, protected by white men, but I've been rethinking that. I'm beginning to understand that white patriarchy's grasp on white women is not soft: It's a death grip.

In my conversations with white women, this revelation is being confirmed. White women have been reared by white patriarchy. They marry white patriarchy and themselves rear white patriarchy. They are closer to it than any other women on earth.

Through the #MeToo, #TimesUp, #ChurchToo, and #SilenceIsNotSpiritual movements, as well as the Women's March, white women have begun to trust their power and renounce their compacts with white patriarchy. But alliance with women of color in 2020 will require much more than agreement that rape is wrong. It ultimately requires willingness to renounce the privileges of whiteness.

Now, let's talk. ❖

Lisa Sharon Harper is president of FreedomRoad.us and the author of several books, including the forthcoming *Fortune*, the story of her family and a call for reparations.



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DEEP ECONOMY

BY BILL McKIBBEN

THE HOUNDS OF HELL



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Let's talk about hell. In David Bentley Hart's remarkably important book *That All Shall Be Saved*, he outlines the reasons that we should not fear an afterlife of unending torment in a Dantesque lake of flame. "It makes no more sense, then, to say that God allows creatures to damn themselves out of his love for them or out of his respect

for their freedom than to say a father might reasonably allow his deranged child to thrust her face into a fire out of a tender regard for her moral autonomy." Read the book—really, read it. It will inoculate you against some of the ideas about God that can't help but edge their way into your psyche.

But then let's talk about the other kind of hell, the one we make for ourselves. And here I'm going to skip the usual discussions about the various "hells" we might build by our greed, our narcissism, our selfishness—the hells of addiction, loneliness. They're very real, very sad, and very overwhelming, as are the Hades of poverty and of racial oppression.

"LAST YEAR SAW A NEW RECORD FOR CARBON EMISSIONS—AND THE HOTTEST MONTH EVER RECORDED."

For now, though, I want to talk about the hell that looks like hell. In Australia, in the first days of the new year, bushfires were creating walls of flame 100 feet high or more. The greatest heat wave in Australian history meant that the average high temperature for the whole continent one day topped 105 degrees Fahrenheit. In the suburbs of Sydney, one of the world's richest cities, the temperature topped 120 degrees, and the lovely capital of Canberra had the dirtiest air on earth as wildfire smoke turned the midday black (and the night red). Those venturing into the burned-over areas reported the sound of burned animals screaming—scientists think the number of animals killed over the course of weeks numbered in the billions, and several species may have been driven extinct. Volunteer firefighters spent weeks trying to beat back the flames, but often they simply had to withdraw—the winds topped 50 miles an hour, carrying embers miles to where they could touch off new blazes.

God told Noah that God wouldn't flood us again but didn't tell us we couldn't flood ourselves (just ask the families of the Indonesians killed in record floods even as Australia burned). And God didn't tell us we'd be consigned to the flames—but neither did God tell us we couldn't consign ourselves. And we have. Last year saw a new record for carbon emissions. It saw the hottest month ever recorded on this planet. It saw millions of climate refugees on the move.

If the gospels don't tell us much about hell, they do tell us about love. They tell us to love our neighbors—which is what we have to do. We have to keep the fossil fuel industry from killing them. We have to keep the banks from funding the fossil fuel industries. We have a lot of work to do, to keep the hounds of hell off our heels. It's the Lord's work. ♦

Bill McKibben, founder of 350.org, is the author most recently of *Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?*



SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY

For many involved in interfaith engagement, the goal is to seek common ground and values. The assumption is that differences are the source of conflict and peace is predicated on seeing each other as having more in common than different. This is a framing I hear again and again. It is certainly a necessary first step for communities that have narrow ranges of engagement with one another. For instance, it is powerful to watch students in my interfaith classes at Christian seminaries recognize how Islam and Christianity share a reverence for Christ.

But there are reasons we need to move beyond this mere appreciation of commonalities between religious traditions as the foundation for interreligious engagement.

Episodic empathy. Students and community leaders often develop a profound empathy when they engage with another tradition. However, if we don't teach tools for navigating difference between communities, the empathy can become narrowly tied to the limited episodes of encounter, which are often facilitated by third parties. Does this empathy move from an affect of appreciation

in that moment into an operationalized form of engagement across difference? When a crisis occurs and there is a rise in hatred, does the mere "common ground" approach promote behavior of deep allyship for when a community is targeted for hate and violence?

Trauma-informed interfaith engagement.

It is important to name the wounds of how communities have historically and in contemporary times hurt one another. For educators and facilitators, this involves a complex set of dialogic design challenges. We must create space for trauma-informed interfaith dialogue, using, for instance, the long-term approach of sustained dialogue advanced by Harold Saunders.

If interfaith encounter happens without any historical context of how people in the room carry wounds, and if they must face those whom they construe as having inflicted that trauma, then people will shut down, leave the dialogue, or in fact be traumatized by it. If you've had people suddenly drop out of interreligious spaces, this may be what happened.

Sometimes, when pursuing religious and interfaith literacy, the only knowledge that is promoted or learning that is rewarded is the type that minimizes the differences between religious traditions and affirms commonalities. We live in a time where building skills for dialogue should include not just building bridges but also sometimes fragile, complex ships that go between the shores of difference. Perhaps the bridge metaphor should be retired. We need to think about how religious education, interfaith encounter, and conversation reflect the difficult and dangerous stakes of this type of engagement. Peace comes not through being the same but in learning how to move through difference. Delve deeply, build slowly, and transform the world together. ✨

**"PEACE COMES NOT
THROUGH BEING
THE SAME BUT IN
LEARNING HOW TO
MOVE THROUGH
DIFFERENCE."**

Najeeba Syeed has been recognized for her work in interfaith peacebuilding, restorative justice, and religious leadership in Muslim contexts. She is co-editor of a forthcoming volume on interreligious learning and theological education.

EYEWITNESS

4



**"WE'RE ASKING
PASTORS TO ADDRESS
THE CENSUS FROM
THE PULPIT."**

STAND UP AND BE COUNTED

“When it comes to the 2020 Census, many Latino congregants say, ‘Look, I know how important this is, I know what’s at stake, but I don’t feel comfortable sharing this much information about my home.’

Right now there is no trust in government. The anti-immigrant rhetoric and action from Washington has unleashed serious fear in our community. And not just among the undocumented: If I’m a U.S. citizen and I live with someone who is still in the process of citizenship, I am not going to open that door.

That’s why churches and clergy play such an immense role: You trust your pastor, you trust the church. If they’re telling you ‘Your information is safe’ and ‘Look, I’m doing it also,’ it gives you a sense of comfort.

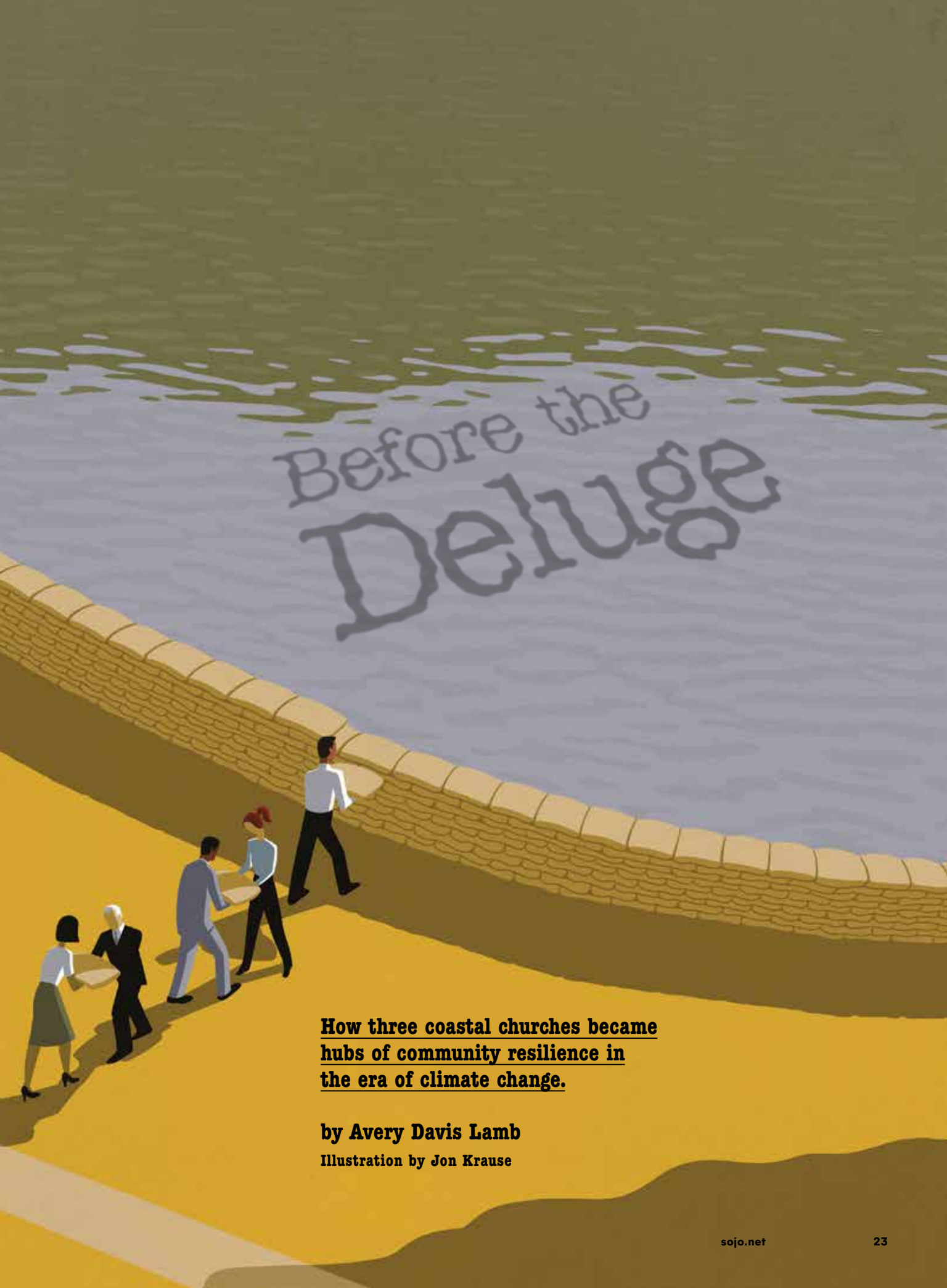
Under the leadership of Rev. Raúl Ruiz, the New Jersey Latino Pastors and Ministers Coalition has launched the *Uno Más Tú Cuentas* campaign. We’re asking pastors to address the Census from the pulpit—not just ‘here’s a special announcement.’ We’re asking congregants to stay for coffee in the community room and complete the Census form through tablets and phones.

The reason we migrate to this country is because we understand that getting our kids educated is the only way to dramatically change the course of our families. That’s why the urgency of the Census resonates: It comes down to whether our child is going to be able to be funded for the Head Start program, whether our child’s school has enough resources, whether my child who qualifies for free lunch will have it or not.” ✦

Wendy Martinez is a founder and spokesperson of the New Jersey Latino Pastors and Ministers Coalition. She spoke with *Sojourners* associate editor Betsy Shirley about the fear many Latinos still have about the 2020 U.S. Census, even though the citizenship question was removed.





An illustration showing a group of six people in business attire carrying boxes away from a yellow sea wall. The sea wall is being overtopped by a large, turbulent, olive-green sea. The title 'Before the Deluge' is written in a large, stylized font on the surface of the water.

Before the Deluge

**How three coastal churches became
hubs of community resilience in
the era of climate change.**

by Avery Davis Lamb

Illustration by Jon Krause



We do not need another litany of climate disaster. What we need are stories of climate resilience—communities responding to the physical and spiritual needs wrought by climate collapse. For millions of people, those needs are brought by floodwaters inundating communities with rain and rising tides. And as waters rise, some churches also rise to generate spiritual and physical resilience, reimagining their land, mission, and ministry for the age of climate change. According to these congregations, climate action is not a deviation from the mission of the church; it's the only way to remain true to the message of the gospel when floodwaters are rushing into our houses and sanctuaries.

Flow, river, flow

Were it not for the “Shrove Tuesday Pancake Dinner Tonight!” banner and obligatory “Episcopal church in 1 mile” sign, you could drive past St. Luke’s Episcopal Church and miss the building entirely. Obscured behind a line of oaks and a hillock of native hydrangea, the sanctuary almost disappears into the landscape. For Rev. Diana Carroll, that’s the hope.

When Carroll moved to Annapolis, Md., in 2012 to serve St. Luke’s, the four acres behind the church, which abuts Back Creek, a tributary of the Chesapeake, were a tangled mess of brush. The church had planned to clear that land to build a large sanctuary and convert the current structure into an education building, but Carroll and members of the St. Luke’s Green Team suggested St. Luke’s keep its current sanctuary and use the five acres as “a sanctuary without walls.” As Carroll envisioned it, if the church restored the land, it would still be “a sacred space as had always been dreamed about for that location.”

For years, St. Luke’s has been involved in climate action, integrating climate literacy into its preaching and education while advocating for stronger climate policy at the Maryland State House. So in 2017, when the 120-person congregation received a total of nearly \$2 million in grants—largely from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the Chesapeake Bay Trust, plus small grants and donations through the church—to restore wetlands and a buried stream on their property that drained into Back Creek, they realized the project was a physical expression of their commitment to earthkeeping. With the help of an ecological restoration company, they coaxed back to the surface the stream that had been diverted through stormwater pipes and built a cascading streambed, with

step pools and weirs—low dams to slow water flow—to filter the water as it makes its way toward Back Creek. They named the restored stream Bowen's Branch, after a late congregant who cared deeply about watershed stewardship in Annapolis.

When I visited St. Luke's in 2019, Carroll and I followed the curve of the stream to its mouth, which is now a living shoreline, a small coastal edge made of native plants and natural materials rather than a concrete seawall. In an age of climate crisis, marshes like this one are critical: As sea levels rise, marshes engage in a kind of dance with the rising tides through a process called accretion. This is especially important in a place like Annapolis, where waters breaching sea walls and submerging parking lots, roads, and sidewalks has become a frequent problem (only four such events were recorded in the early 1960s, compared to 63 in 2017). When the dock in downtown Annapolis floods, explained Carroll, the church's marsh helps absorb the extra water. The marsh is also a carbon sink, more effective at sequestering carbon than the equivalent area of dry land.

By restoring their land to serve its intended purpose, the church created a climate sanctuary: absorbing higher tides, filtering polluted stormwater from extreme rain events, hosting displaced creatures, and drawing carbon out of the air. And while St. Luke's sanctuary is high enough above sea level to be outside the floodplain, the same is not true for all Annapolis residents. The church is in solidarity with those neighbors, absorbing the water their houses cannot, holding a space for lament when devastation comes, and advocating for equitable climate solutions—an ecotone where the meditative ebb of human action meets the flow of steadily rising tides.

The church is in solidarity with its neighbors, absorbing water their houses cannot.



Photo courtesy of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Annapolis, Md.

Data values

In Charleston, S.C., Paul Rienzo, pastor of Crosstowne Church, sat behind a desk constructed out of a reclaimed door. This door, removed after the first flood at his church, is a daily reminder of the Christian call to reclamation and restoration, Rienzo told me. It is from this desk that Rienzo has worked to reshape the mission of this church in the wake of the extreme flooding the Charleston community has seen in recent years.

Rienzo describes Crosstowne as a “new-fangled evangelical” church, a 600-person congregation that is “good for somebody that’s on their third marriage ... good for the doubter, and we’re really good for atheists.” It’s also a church that has flooded three years in a row.

Three hurricanes, in 2015, 2016, and 2017, pummeled Crosstowne, each dumping enough water to require a massive rebuild of the sanctuary. After the third flood, the church interior was rebuilt in two weeks, but the church recognized that rebuilding wasn’t enough. The leadership team at Crosstowne decided to do something unusual for a church: gather scientific data. They hired a hydrology team and an environmental lawyer to analyze the onshore causes of the flooding so that the church could serve as a trustworthy hub of communication with their neighbors and the city.

The study found that as climate change exacerbates rainfall intensity, unsustainable development results in water flowing over concrete rather than percolating into the soil. When rain falls, streets and storm drains are inundated with more water than they can handle, and the excess water ends up 3 feet deep in the sanctuary of Crosstowne. According to the Fourth National Climate Assessment, by the end of the century heavy rainfall events in the Southeast U.S. are expected to double, and the amount of water falling on extreme rain days will increase by 21 percent. As more rain falls on hard surfaces around Charleston, Crosstowne has realized it will be underwater more frequently.

With their data-driven study, Crosstowne became experts on flooding in the area around Charleston’s Church Creek Basin. Rienzo worked with the city to develop new stormwater retention guidelines, reshaping how development is done in Charleston. The benefits of Crosstowne’s work extended beyond its walls, to local homeowners who “were



looking at buyouts, flooding, delays,” Rienzo told the local Live 5 News. “So we began to see we were not just doing this study for ourselves. It was a study to do for the community around us.”

While most in the city supported Crosstowne’s efforts, others worried that small-scale, privately funded reports like the church’s study would distract from the need for a comprehensive citywide study. But even in the midst of pressure from many sides to, as Rienzo described, “let the scientists and the politicians do their job and, you religious folks, you go in the other room and talk about values,” Crosstowne held firm to its conviction that getting involved in policy—even when inconvenient—was an act of faith. “It just seemed like the gospel thing to do,” said Rienzo.

Rienzo continued to tend the spiritual needs of Crosstowne, which included congregants who had been displaced from their own homes in the floods. He led a sermon series on the book of Nehemiah so that the church would see itself “as being a part of a biblical story.”

The eponymous book describes how Nehemiah led the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem, a task fraught with conflict from Judah’s enemies. Nevertheless, the people of Jerusalem “committed themselves to the common good” (Nehemiah 2:18), standing shoulder to shoulder, each person building a segment of wall “opposite his house” (3:6-12). For Rienzo, this was an important lesson. “[Nehemiah] got a buy-in from everybody. And so that was one of the important pieces of it: that everybody was going to be a part of this solution together.”

Crossing over the threshold of Crosstowne, I noticed a watermark, 3 feet high on the door. While the rest of the church was renovated, they kept the doors as a reminder of where they have been. As congregants enter the church, they symbolically proclaim a remembrance of the flood, a celebration of Crosstowne’s reclamation, and a recommitment to the work of justice in Charleston.

“Everybody was going to be a part of this solution together.”



Down by the riverside

Given the reality of the climate crisis unfolding around us, the time for hope as our driving force has passed, writes climate activist Mary Annaise Heglar. Instead, we need courage to be “strong enough, ferocious enough, brave enough” to fight for what’s left. That courage is what I saw when I visited St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in 2019.

St. Paul’s is nestled feet from the Pamlico River in Aurora, N.C., a 500-person town known for its museum featuring locally found fossils. While these preserved traces of prehistoric organisms bring tourists to the town, their ancient, decayed, carboniferous cousins, converted to coal, oil, and gas, are forcing out Aurora’s residents.

In 2011, Hurricane Irene slammed into North Carolina’s Pamlico Sound, raising the tidal river to 10 feet above sea level, well beyond its banks, to swallow St. Paul’s. It happened again in 2018, when Hurricane Florence dumped waist-deep water in Aurora and broke 28 flood records across the Carolinas. It is almost guaranteed the church will flood again soon. After Florence, the church was able to rebuild with insurance money, but that’s not the case for many Aurora residents who are struggling with the decision of whether to stay and face the floods or leave. Many have chosen the latter, and St. Paul’s, once a flourishing church with full pews, has diminished to six members.

In the very pews that were floating a year earlier, Glenoria Jennette, a second-generation member of St. Paul’s, and James Parker, a 91-year-old lifelong resident of Aurora, share stories of how the sea’s rising has affected their lives. Jennette lost her home, and nearly her husband, in Hurricane Irene and was forced to move inland to higher ground. Parker formerly worked in construction and has been part of efforts to raise houses and other structures onto stilts, an expensive adaptation technique that is inaccessible to low-income communities.

As we talked, Gerald Godette, who serves as a steward at the church, gently wove in the science behind climate change. Godette, a former marine biologist, went into ministry in 2015; faith, justice, and science, in that order, inform and guide Godette’s work in the community. He’s also a skilled facilitator, able to guide a conversation that weaves together Jennette and Parker’s stories with the science of climate change and scripture.

What’s remarkable about St. Paul’s isn’t the scale of their work; what’s remarkable is that despite the sea shrinking their congregation and driving away their neighbors, the six-person community has not become discouraged and inwardly focused. Godette recently partnered with North Carolina Interfaith Power and Light and the National Religious Partnership for the Environment to host public roundtables with coastal churches to talk about sea level rise adaptation. But as Godette told me before I visited, he also believes casual conversation is an important form of climate education. Often, if you “try to get your congregants to come to a formal setting to discuss climate change, they will not come,” he explains; the community is rightly suspicious of political and economic agendas disguised as church. So Godette has become a master of creating informal climate conversations.

While the shrinking size of the congregation presents chal-

lenges for St. Paul’s sustainability, the core of the church’s courage is a willingness to engage in conversations about climate change. Recent data shows that nearly 70 percent of people in the U.S. agree the climate is changing, but about two-thirds never talk about it. The same problem persists in our churches, where climate change often seems less important than other social issues or too political for the pews—at least until water floods those same pews.

There are physical needs that remain in Aurora, including a desperate need for funding to implement adaptation measures such as elevating the church and nearby houses on stilts. While federal programs exist to support adaptation, the scale of those programs is nowhere near the level of need. And the congregants at St. Paul’s see the same story of their history played out again: While wealthier, whiter communities receive funding to relocate or adapt, Aurora is left behind.

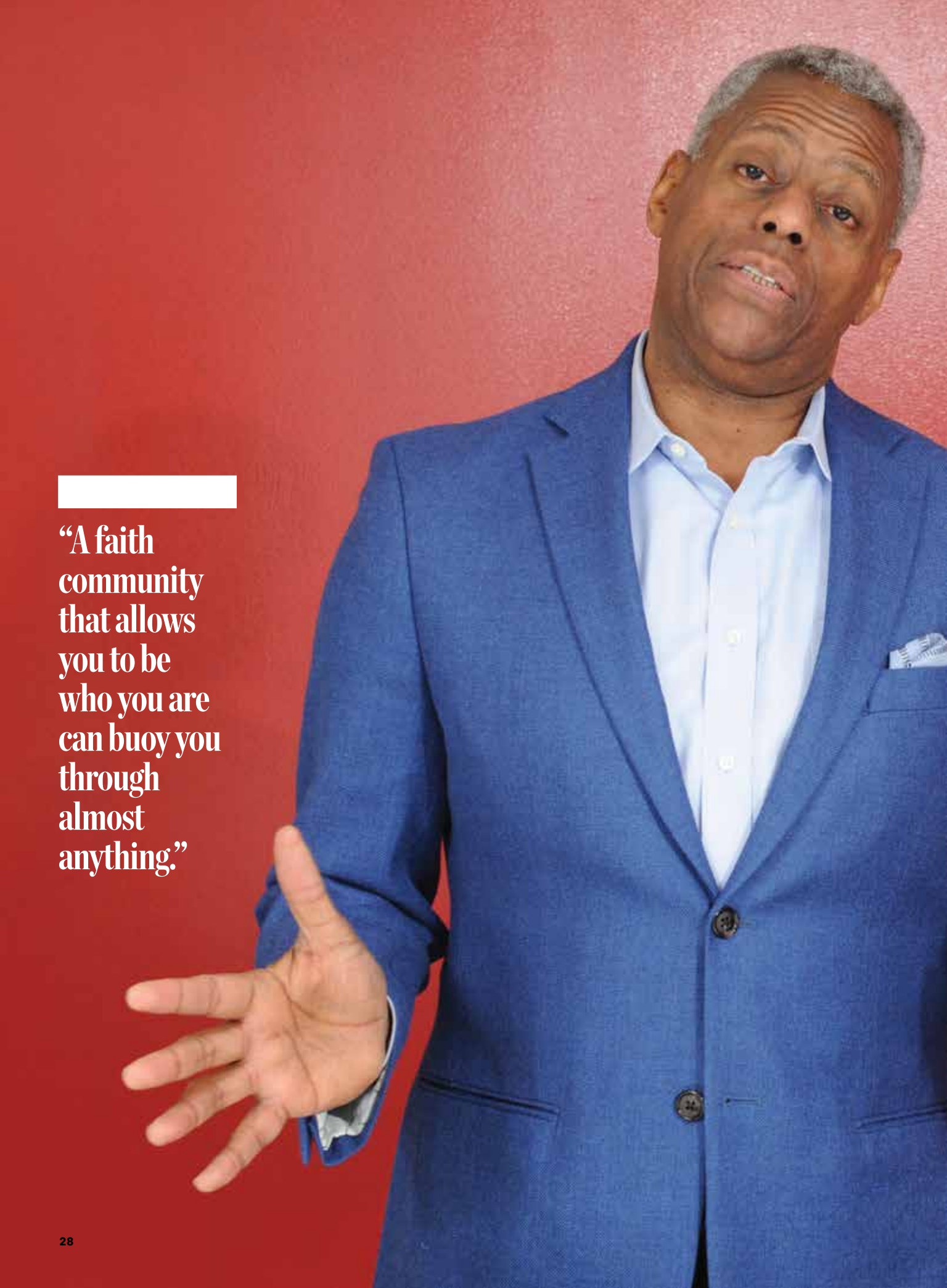
Yet, courage persists. Starting with their conversations in the pews of St. Paul’s, Jennette, Parker, and Godette continue to engage in local advocacy efforts to change those stories. And inside that riverside sanctuary, one informal conversation at a time, a community is strengthened.

Wading in

Before I leave St. Luke’s in Annapolis, Rev. Carroll tells me that the climate crisis and St. Luke’s response has strengthened her conviction that God uses the most unexpected people to do God’s work. “No one would have expected that such a small, financially struggling congregation as ours would have engaged in a \$2 million project to do something that on the surface doesn’t actually benefit us. And yet it’s so clearly part of God’s mission in the world and God’s desire for the healing of the world.”

What these churches demonstrate is that we do not need a radical revision of the Christian mission during the climate crisis. What we do need is a return to the radical theology of the gospel and its messages of restoration, reclamation, and courage—the courage to radically reimagine the ways we use the gifts of our faith communities to meet the scale of the climate crisis and the imagination to stand shoulder to shoulder with churches across the country, commit ourselves to the common good, and together lay our small bricks of resilience. ♦

Avery Davis Lamb (@averydavislamb), a writer and activist, is studying the intersection of Christianity and the environment at Duke Divinity School and the Nicholas School of the Environment.

A man with grey hair, wearing a blue suit jacket over a light blue button-down shirt, is gesturing with his right hand. He is looking slightly to the side with a thoughtful expression. The background is a solid red color.

**“A faith
community
that allows
you to be
who you are
can buoy you
through
almost
anything.”**



By Da'Shawn Mosley

Photos by Lloyd Wolf

In 1985, when Jesse Milan Jr. was in his late 20s, no one from his Philadelphia church attended his partner's funeral. Not because they refused, but because Milan didn't invite them. Doing so would have required him to say what he felt uncomfortable sharing: He loved a man who had HIV. He is a man who has HIV.

"This is never going to happen to me again," Milan vowed to himself at the funeral, regarding the loneliness he felt because he didn't draw close his church family at one of the most painful moments of his life.

Milan is now the president and CEO of AIDS United, an organization fighting the HIV epidemic in the U.S. He is adamant that no one in the HIV community be isolated from the love and support they need. "People living with HIV," said Milan, "have a longing to belong. A longing to be cared for and a longing to not be silent or secret."

A lifelong Episcopalian, Milan grew up in a congregation in the Diocese of Kansas, following the example of his mother and father in serving their spiritual home and, in times of need, allowing their siblings in Christ to serve them. Milan kept this mutuality in mind when he enrolled at Princeton University and, struggling to transition from public school and homesick for his church, joined the Episcopal Church at Princeton. It was, Milan told *Sojourners*, "an anchor, a port to tap into on a regular basis whenever I needed it."

'An Organic Part of Who We Are'

For Jesse Milan Jr., helping diverse communities end the HIV epidemic is a matter of faith, hope, and love.

Helping communities live

For many people today, the closest we get to understanding the impact of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s and early '90s is through stage and screen portrayals such as *Pose*, *Angels in America*, and *Rent*. For others, the memories and losses of that time are vivid and unforgettable.

For instance, Jesse Peel, a gay psychiatrist and community organizer, documented in his journals the avoidance and terror of HIV that overtook his home city, Atlanta, and the nation. As many people rapidly contracted and died of the disease, doctors struggled to understand what was happening and many nurses refused to bring meals into the hospital rooms of the stricken, Peel wrote in documents he donated to a collection at Emory University. By 1994, AIDS was the leading cause of death for Americans age 25 to 44. It killed more than 350,000 people in the country between 1981 and 1995.

"I think the experience of people who are of a certain age will always be colored by our experience of the death and the dying," said Milan. "Today, I sense that [younger] people's commitment to HIV/AIDS work is more about the rights and the inequalities that are manifested in HIV and AIDS. They have a broad lens about where human rights need to advance, and that broad lens includes the trans community and all others."

In the early years of the epidemic, many pastors and religious people publicly denounced and turned their backs on HIV-positive people. Others embraced those who were suffering, opening care programs and advocating for government funding. Reminding the nation's leaders of their responsibility to the HIV community is a job that's been done by many Christians and is a significant part of AIDS United's history and present work.

Although AIDS United is headquartered in Washington, D.C., the organization is not content with just helping residents of large urban areas while ignoring the needs of rural communities. From 2010 to 2016, HIV diagnoses decreased by 21 percent, but the decline wasn't equally distributed throughout the country and across races. In 2017, the South had more than half of the nation's recent HIV diagnoses. In 2018, even though African Americans were 13 percent of the country's population, they accounted for 42 percent of new HIV diagnoses in the U.S. The spread of the illness nationwide is in part fueled by the epidemic of opioid abuse that is linked to



"People living with HIV are learning to tell our stories and tell them in ways that can be heard by Democrats and Republicans."

increased use of injected drugs. Unlike major cities, many rural locations lack extensive experience with, and means to combat, the illness. The challenges they face are immense.

This is why Milan and his team created the Southern HIV Impact Fund, which announced its second round of grants early this year, totaling nearly \$2.9 million for 43 health organizations in the South—groups such as the East Texas Cares Resource Center in Tyler, Texas, the Southwest Louisiana Area Health Education Center, in Lake Charles, La., and the Affinity Health Center in Rock Hill, S.C. In addition, AIDS United created a hurricane relief fund for HIV-positive people and provided grants to transgender leaders to empower them to help prevent the spread of HIV and stand alongside the HIV-positive people in their communities.

Nearly 40,000 people in the U.S. were diagnosed with HIV in 2018, and nearly 13,000 people with AIDS in the U.S. die

annually, according to 2016 estimates. Early treatment will prevent or delay HIV's evolution to AIDS, but access to health care in this country is tenuous for many, with the future up in the air during this 2020 presidential race. The biotech company Gilead Sciences started the new decade by making its drugs to prevent and combat HIV more expensive. So it's not a surprise that only between 50 and 60 percent of the 1.1 million people in the U.S. living with HIV are receiving consistent medical care to suppress the virus.

"Medically, financially, and socially, HIV changes your life forever," wrote Milan in an article titled "Aging Successfully with HIV/AIDS," published by the Black AIDS Institute, of which he is chair emeritus. "I must never forget to take my medications."

In the '80s and '90s, many HIV-positive people didn't think that aging and thriving—one day reaching their 50s, their 60s, and beyond—was part of their future. Now it's a possibility, but who will have the resources to achieve it: not just the money to afford medicine, but also friendship, a group of people who care?

This is where, Milan told *Sojourners*, faith communities can do a lot of good. "If your faith community allows you to be who you are and embraces you, that community can buoy you through almost anything."

The power of stories and allies

In May 2016, Milan was elected to a four-year term on the standing committee of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland. In that role, he helps advise the bishop of Maryland on various issues. "What's really wonderful for me," Milan noted, "is that I'm on the standing committee for the first African American bishop in the history of the diocese." Previously, Milan held leadership roles on the first HIV/AIDS commission for the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania and served as president of the board of the National Episcopal AIDS Coalition. In these denominational roles he brings the wisdom of all his experiences, from his professional start as a labor attorney in Philadelphia to his leadership of AIDS United.

And despite AIDS United's domestic focus, his service to the HIV community has not been limited to the United States. On behalf of the U.S. State Department, he has traveled to seven African nations, including South Africa, where one of his most memorable experiences occurred. "I got to give the sermon on Sunday morning at St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town," Milan said, his voice filling with awe, "and

"How impactful would it be for a legislator to hear from our families, not just those who have lost someone to AIDS but someone who's concerned for their family members with HIV?"

you know whose church St. George's Cathedral is? Bishop Tutu's.

"And I got to climb the stairs to the pulpit where not only Bishop Tutu spoke but so did Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. What I will never forget is that when the service was over and I was shaking hands with everyone, a white Afrikaner wearing cowboy boots came up and shook my hand and said, 'That was one of the best sermons I've ever heard.'" For a black man—a gay, HIV-positive, African American man whose parents were engaged in the U.S. civil rights movement—it was a profound moment.

That sort of exchange—a sharing of stories and values—is something everyday people can do to help defeat the epidemic, said Milan. U.S. governmental aid to fight HIV has often been directed to other countries. The Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief created by George W. Bush's administration allotted \$15 billion to developing countries. That led journalist Gwen Ifill to ask then-Vice President Dick Cheney and the 2004 Democratic nominee for vice president John Edwards what they would do about AIDS in the U.S. Edwards spoke about AIDS in Africa. Cheney said he didn't know about the statistics of black women affected by the disease in the U.S. It may be safe to say, 16 years later, that tackling HIV in our own country wasn't either of their top priorities. Will the same prove to be true about the Trump administration and its opponents in the 2020 election?

"We hear so often from legislative offices," said Milan, "that the most powerful thing they hear from constituents who are doing advocacy are personal stories of impact ... of what's needed, or the impact of what's not being done. People living with HIV are learning to tell our stories and tell them in ways that can be heard

by Democrats and Republicans.

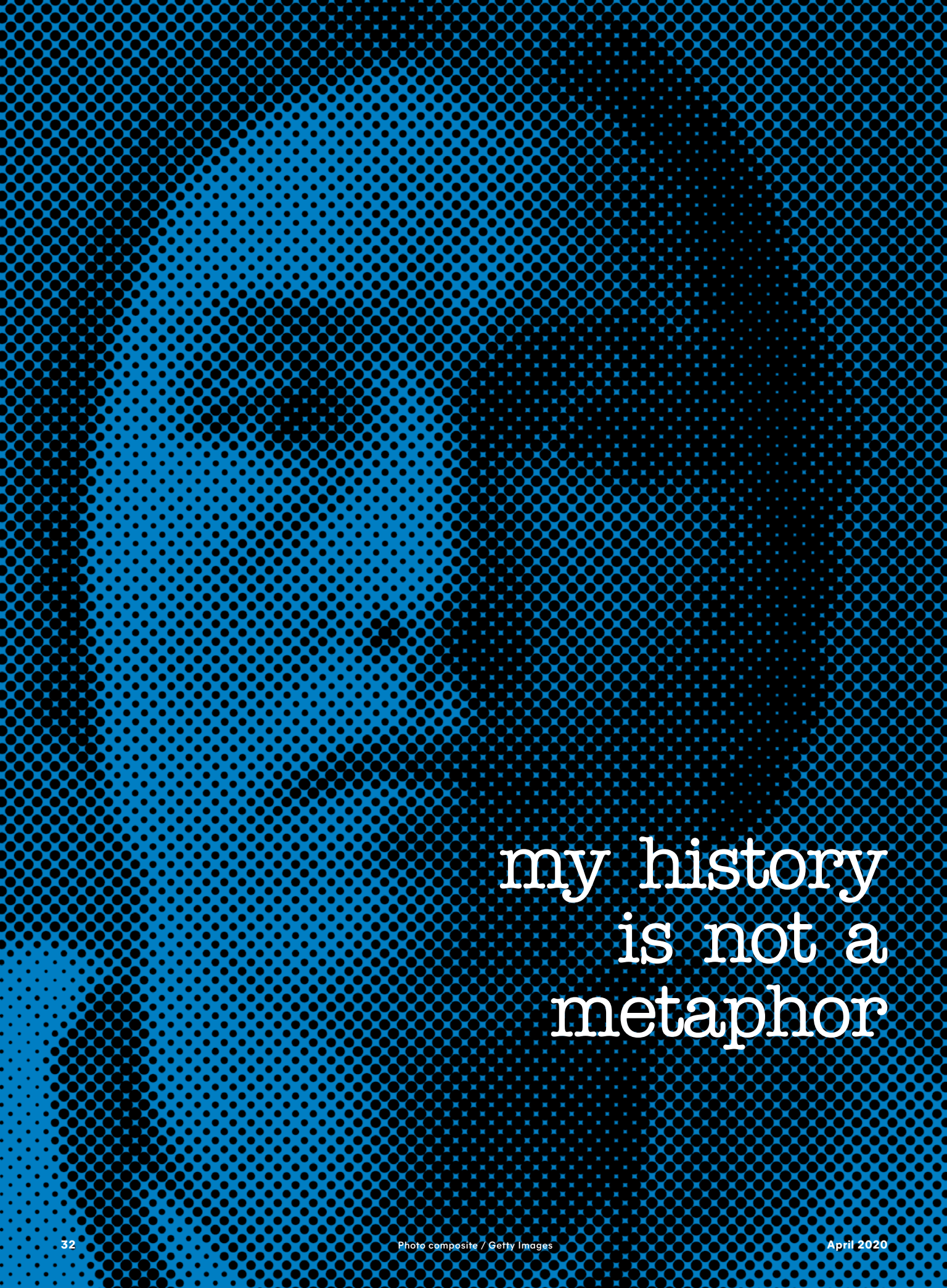
"But what we need more of are our allies and family members to tell their share of the story as well," Milan continued. "How impactful would it be for a legislator to also hear from our mothers, our sisters, our brothers, our uncles, not just those who have lost someone to AIDS but someone who's concerned for their family members with HIV? The parent of a 13-year-old who wants sexual health education in their schools, the brother of a gay man who wants his sibling to have access to PrEP. Those will be powerful stories, just as our white and Jewish and Catholic allies helped move the civil rights movement forward."

Sustained in hope

The friends and loved ones of Milan and his husband, William Roberts, certainly have a story to tell. They have helped the couple persist through their lows and celebrated their triumphs. In 2008, on the 20th anniversary of Milan and Roberts' relationship, the same year that the California Supreme Court decided to allow same-sex marriages in the state, they were married by Oakland Mayor Ron Dellums. News of Milan and Roberts' big day was included in the weddings section of *The New York Times*.

"My most proud accomplishment," said Milan, "is that my husband and I have been together for 31 years, because we met during the [peak era of] the HIV epidemic. The HIV epidemic is an organic part of who we are, and the faith community has made it possible for us to transcend the sadness, to find hope and healing and happiness." ♦

Da'Shawn Mosley is assistant editor of *Sojourners* magazine.



my history
is not a
metaphor

The church
was an
accomplice in
**stripping
home and
identity**
from me
and my
ancestors.

But the
church can
also overturn
hierarchies
and bring a
freedom that
does not rely
on the sweet
by and by.

By Patty Krawec



Home. Perpetual wandering is a crucial aspect of the Christian narrative. Cast from Eden, Christians are forever strangers in a strange land.

But for black and Indigenous people, that means something very different. If the original sin of the colonized West is genocide and slavery, that is not our sin. And yet it rendered us homeless as surely as the apple in the Hebrew narrative. Forcibly uprooted again and again, black and Indigenous people seek to create, and return, home.

Indigenous scholars such as Kim TallBear and Kim Anderson have described the power that the American idea of home has on the minds of people and politics, and the threat posed to that ideal by Indigenous families who did not live in nuclear relationships with women in a subordinate role. Historically, land allotments for settlers seeking to homestead or for Indigenous people were allotted to heads of households based on the size of households; having a wife and children ensured a larger allotment. Indigenous people who were determined to be more than “half-blood” were not given land outright but had their allotment held in reserve because they were not considered capable of managing the land themselves.

The founders of the United States and generations of subsequent legislators defined the home in narrow and specific terms, creating laws and policies that ensured that free blacks, Indigenous people, immigrants, and poor whites were unable to achieve this American Dream. Vagrancy laws separated families and jailed people under vague and arbitrarily written codes. The Homestead Act, while providing land for settler families, required clearing the West of the people living there. People were framed as “nomadic” in order to justify the theft. The practice of redlining, marking boundaries around primarily black neighborhoods, was used to deny mortgages and exclude black families from home ownership.

The homeless, whatever their stories, are still viewed as suspect by Western society. People whose sexuality does not conform to the American ideal have long been described as threats to marriage and family, and many landlords rely on their Christian beliefs to justify denying homes to LGBTQ people. Yet around the world, U.S. media promotes a glowing image of the American home and family—making promises the country refuses to keep.

The church's role

So it's a strange dissonance in church, singing songs about wandering and seeking a home when, as an Indigenous woman, my homelessness is *because* of the church's role in empire and colonization. This was not just complicity, but active engagement, directing the process and benefiting from the displacement and forcible relocation of black and Indigenous people, as well as from foreign wars that destabilize other countries and generate refugees and asylum seekers.

It was a pope who wrote the so-called Doctrine of Discovery, giving colonizers rights over our land; Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg cited it to deny an Oneida land claim in 2005. It was the churches who ran residential schools and whose missionaries paved, and continue to pave, the way for capitalism and colonial government by marketing the constructed idea of home as a Christian ideal and model.

In his book *Stamped from the Beginning*, Ibram X. Kendi notes that before the 1820s, depictions of Jesus in any form were discouraged as idolatrous by the Protestant church. But in the emerging race-based American identity, it was important to associate Jesus with whiteness so that even within the church, black and Indigenous people were reminded of their place in the social order. The American Bible Society, the American Sunday School Union, and the American Tract Society all promoted images of a white Jesus in their materials. Every Sunday I sit beside a stained-glass window of white Jesus.

“One in Christ Jesus”

What does home mean for those whose creation narrative roots them in the place to which Christian wanderers came with guns and laws, displacing and relocating black and Indigenous people again and again? Through these

actions, the church created physical homelessness, but in verses such as Colossians 3:11 and Galatians 3:28, and it also creates a kind of internal homelessness. “There is neither Jew nor Gentile ... for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” It’s as if our very identity, the way in which we move through the world, is erased as surely as our connection to the place of our creation, our existence as people.

The church practices a kind of Christian colorblindness with these verses. It says that we are not who we are—we are all the same—which in Western society means we are all white or aspiring to assimilate into Eurocentric norms. So we make metaphors from brutal history and sing songs about being slaves, written by people whose ancestors were not slaves. We sing songs about wandering, written by people whose ancestors rendered others homeless. We sing these songs in a state that still allows slavery through imprisonment and continues to displace and relocate black and Indigenous people.

But my identity and history are not metaphors. I don’t stop being a woman when I walk into church, and those verses from Colossians and Galatians have not stopped many churches from having rigid gender roles that exclude women from positions of authority. So why do they render our race and other identities invisible?

Called to live differently

Race, at its root, is about hierarchies, as are ideas about gender and gender roles, social class, and the way we conceptualize disabilities. Perhaps these verses are about eliminating hierarchies and not identity. Sylvia Keesmaat and Brian Walsh give us an alternate way to read the book of Romans in their work *Romans Disarmed*, demonstrating how Paul inverts the imperial system and its hierarchies and calls us to live differently.

Paul lived in a highly stratified world in which those from different social places did not socialize. Yet, in Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11, he writes that within the church we are all one. He is not ignoring how we move through the world. A slave and a free person would have very different lives outside of the church walls.

But within the church, we are called to live differently, and by living differently within that community, it becomes possible to invert the broader social order and bring about a freedom that does not rely on the sweet by and by. I suggest that we can only do so when we recognize, and reckon with, our own social positioning—when we look at that stained-glass Jesus and see how deeply invested the church has been in maintaining hierarchies rather than inverting them. We have become accustomed to acknowledging our privilege, but the inverse of privilege is deprivation, and we are not accustomed to considering how our position relies on the deprivation of others.

In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 (which starts with “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.”), Paul gives us a structure that may help in recognizing and dismantling hierarchies. Paul doesn’t say that every part of the body is the same,

We sing songs about wandering, written by people whose ancestors rendered others homeless.

erasing our differences. Rather, in this passage he reinforces those differences and tells us to stop trying to be the same. In this passage, he presents those differences as strength. How do we reconcile this presentation of differences as strength with the apparent erasure of differences in Galatians and Colossians? We do this by focusing on the hierarchies that our differences represent in the world.

Michael Krause, a teaching pastor at Southridge Community Church in St. Catharines, Ontario, suggests that when Paul writes about the parts of the body that are considered shameful, he may be referring to those members of our communities who have been deemed shameful by the state—those who are vulnerable because of their race, gender, sexuality, or disability. The church has a responsibility to protect and treat these people with greater honor, because outside the church they will continue to bear the burden of the state’s oppression. Unless the church listens to them and lifts them up, we will never be free from that oppression. Unless their voices are in positions of real leadership and decision-making, we will be complicit.

A white male, perhaps the great Roman nose of the body, needs no protection and, in fact, may need to be willing to step aside. We have no great need for more white male voices in the church, but we do have need for others. We need to hear from those who are descended from slaves, not those for whom the idea of slavery is an appropriative trope. We need to hear from those who have been rendered homeless, not from those whose wandering is a metaphor. We need to hear from those who are fleeing colonial wars and interference and come seeking protection and help. We need to think about how passages, lessons, and songs are heard by those different communities. Do they feel welcomed or excluded; do they feel seen or erased?

We need to hear from them and invert their place in the social hierarchy, not offer them charity from our benevolent place above them. Not give thanks for our blessings, which they have paid for.

By recognizing our own social positioning and learning to see ourselves in Babylon and Rome instead of as Israel and slaves, we will create a place where those who the church has rendered homeless can find a home. ♦

Patty Krawec (@gindaanis) is an Anishnaabe woman from Lac Seul First Nation, a podcaster on *Medicine for the Resistance*, and a member of Chippawa Presbyterian Church. She lives in Niagara Falls, Ontario.



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SOJOURNERS

DOROTHY DAY DIED NEARLY FOUR DECADES AGO, BUT A NEW FILM SHOWS THAT HER VISION IS VERY MUCH ALIVE.

Documentary



W

When Pope Francis addressed Congress during his 2015 visit to the U.S., he named four great men and women whose legacies

helped shape the fundamental values of the American people: Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr., Thomas Merton, and Dorothy Day, the Catholic social activist and pacifist. It was among his most audacious statements during the trip, and he got away with it because—outside of churches and the peace movement—Dorothy Day, the woman who could become America's next saint, is largely unknown.

Revolution of the Heart: The Dorothy Day Story, a new documentary film by Martin Doblmeier, wants to put that right. More than a biography, this tapestry of archival footage and new interviews—which include Day's granddaughters, plus devotees such as Martin Sheen and Sister Joan Chittister—is narrative theology, an argument for why an anarchist grandma could be a patron saint



for those countering Trump's America. "Dorothy Day spoke out publicly and forcefully in support of fair pay for workers, against the great imbalance of wealth, excessive expenditures for weapons, nuclear proliferation, and unjust wars overseas. We struggle with these same issues today," Doblmeier tells me. He believes her life story is a roadmap, a spiritual guide for troubled times.

The film opens not with Day's birth in 19th century Brooklyn, nor the years before her conversion, which she spent darting from bohemian parties to inner-city Masses, but in the 1950s, when the Catholic Worker movement she co-founded as a network of "houses of hospitality" took to the streets to protest the arms race. We see Day's Catholic personalism—her belief that Christians must take personal moral responsibility for injustice—in action, and it is bracing and alienating. We meet her isolated from the Catholic Church: a voice crying in the wilderness. Doblmeier's nods toward contemporary politics make this a challenging introduction. "I think Dorothy Day presents a direct path that we all can take," he explains. "She believed if you see someone in need, you fix it yourself. You don't wait for the government or a social service agency to intervene."

Doblmeier, a Catholic, treats Day's faith with respect, exploring her criticisms of the church while stressing her obedience to tradition. The film skips back in time to trace Day's spiritual wandering, her battle with and eventual surrender to faith, a process thoughtfully unpacked by one of her biographers, Robert Ellsberg, and Chittister. Convinced that the Catholic Church is "the church of the poor," she still felt she was "going over to the opposition" by joining an institution so aligned with property and capitalism. She resolved that tension at Mass, as activist and philosopher Cornel West observes in a typically insightful contribution: "When she is partaking of the body and blood of Jesus, she is tied to the memory of the blood of those made in the image of God, especially the weak and vulnerable. And so there is a political dimension to this profoundly liturgical act."

"She wasn't, as people might think, a religious leftist," Jim Wallis explains. "She was radical in her social, economic, political views because of her conservative faith."

**THE FILM IS
AN ARGUMENT
FOR WHY AN
ANARCHIST
GRANDMA COULD
BE A PATRON
SAINT FOR THOSE
COUNTERING
TRUMP'S
AMERICA.**

Day's liturgical traditionalism is one of her challenges to modern Catholicism, where "RadTrad" (radical traditionalists) and political radicals are on opposite sides of the altar. Day was afraid that becoming a Catholic meant turning her back on social radicalism, until she met Peter Maurin, the French social activist with whom she would create the Catholic Worker, who introduced her to the Catholic social teaching that became her entire vocation. "Her life was instinctual," Martin Sheen reflects. "She'd see someone fall, she'd help them up. She saw someone hungry, she'd feed them."

A life of such profound integrity was not without cost: One of Day's granddaughters (and biographers), Kate Hennessy, defends her in the movie against pervasive allegations that she was an indifferent mother, more interested in the growing network of Catholic Worker houses and farms than in her daughter, Tamar. The movement lost much Catholic support during World War II when Day refused to compromise her pacifism to endorse just war theory, a position she maintained until her death. A grueling schedule of speaking engagements and a series of heart attacks took their toll, and, by the late 1970s, Day was forced to slow down: "For a woman of such power and such strength to have to submit to that aging process, it broke my heart to see that happening," remembers another granddaughter, Martha Hennessy, in the film's moving conclusion.

Day's cause for sainthood was opened in 2000, 20 years after her death; it took until 2016 for the Catholic Church to open a formal inquiry into her life. Perhaps it is no surprise that it would tread slowly around a woman who spoke about her experience of abortion and never married, who was as critical of clerics as she was of free-loving hippies. Now her canonization rests on a Rome-ratified miracle. Until that day comes, Doblmeier's beautiful documentary is an inspiring call to those fighting the spread of nationalism and racism in their own time to become themselves the miraculous answers to Day's prayers, whispered before the Blessed Sacrament and shouted across the streets of New York City and around the world. ✱

Liz Dodd is home news editor of *The Tablet* and has written for *National Geographic Traveler* and *The Sunday Times* of London.

On Film

From *Until the End of the World*

ERROR: CONNECTION FAILED

By Abby Olcese

M

Midway through the second half of Wim Wenders' *Until the End of the World*, the movie's narrator, Eugene (Sam Neill), plays music with a group of characters in an Australian village. Eugene is on piano, his friend

David (David Gulpilil) plays the didgeridoo, a German private investigator (Rüdiger Vogler) wails on a harmonica, and a French bank robber (Chick Ortega) plays drums while they wait anxiously for news about the destruction of a nuclear satellite, which, we're told, would bring about Armageddon.

Eugene reflects on the journey that's led the group here and realizes this communal moment of joy in the face of fear is its apex. He calls it "a prayer for the wounded earth." In many ways, this 1991 global sci-fi odyssey, recently released in a director's cut by the Criterion Collection, feels like exactly that. It's a prayer for not only its fictional future earth but the self-involved world we live in now, a world drunk on idealized images of ourselves.

Claire (Solveig Dommartin), Eugene's ex, is the film's focus. Feeling adrift after their breakup, Claire falls in love with a stranger, Sam (William Hurt), who hitches a ride with her in France. Sam is wanted by the U.S. government for stealing a camera invented by his father (Max Von Sydow) that records images as brainwaves, allowing the blind to see. Sam travels the globe, gathering video to share with his blind mother (Jeanne Moreau) in Australia. Eugene, hoping to win Claire back, follows in their wake. In the background, the out-of-control satellite looms above the planet, ready to drop out of orbit at any time,

generating global panic and depression.

The effect of Von Sydow's camera is isolating for the characters who use it, rather than connecting. Claire and Sam become lost in images of themselves, forsaking the joyous interactions they once had as they slide into a form of image addiction. It's as if Wenders predicted the way contemporary culture would become undone by the advance of technology, the advent of social media and the overstimulated vacuum it would create.

Until the End of the World meanders, but it's unified by the idea of using story and interaction to heal the wounds our tech-obsessed society has created. Addiction to image has brought isolation, Wenders postulates, but perhaps relationship is the living prayer that reunites. Eugene invokes the gospel of John ("In the beginning was the Word...") in pulling Claire back from the brink, telling her the story of her journey, and reminding her of her connection to the world. Wenders' film suggests seeking genuine interaction instead of facsimiles, and listening to our own stories, might do the same for us. ❖

Abby Olcese (@abbyolcese) is a freelance film critic and writer based in Kansas.

New & Noteworthy

WORDS OF LIFE

More than 50 songwriters, musicians, pastors, and theologians collaborated to create *Neighbor Songs*. This second project from The Porter's Gate brings people from different backgrounds and traditions together to explore themes of justice, doubt, and lament through musical worship.

Integrity Music



Liberating Letters

OtherWise Christian: A Guidebook for Transgender Liberation draws from 25 years of biblical scholarship to guide boundary-breaking contemplation and action. Framed by biblical exegesis, with definitive action items for engagement, *OtherWise Christian* offers a bold and clear interpretation of scripture.

OtherWise Engaged Publishing



All God's People

Church historian Vince L. Bantu wants people to know that "global" Christianity is not new, but ancient. Through history and geography, the roots of Christianity in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East are showcased and centered in *A Multitude of All Peoples*.

IVP Academic

CULTURAL APPRECIATION

By
Faith-Marie
Zamblé



Curated

A few months ago, I found myself in a familiar position: at a museum, taking selfies with an artwork, which, in my defense, was made of mirrored surfaces in the shape of Queen Elizabeth II's

face. The opportunity was too good to resist. There I was, snapping away, long coat and checkered socks coordinating with a print near me that read, "Empire buying begins at home." That's when I heard disgruntled murmurs.

I pretended to photograph more art, all the while inching closer to the source—museum security guards. I listened to them commiserate over their low pay and meager benefits compared to salaried employees, and the unfairness of hourly wages in the case of emergency museum closings. I completely agreed with them.

Since my introduction to art museums, it's become increasingly clear that the values many tout (equity, multiculturalism, and inclusion, for example) are far too vulnerable to the wiles of capital, capital, and capital. Not only is there a

problem with wage and benefit gaps, there's an interesting breakdown of who works in museums and what positions they hold. I remember my first visit to the Art Institute of Chicago: I was an awed high school freshman racing down hallways with my friends, trying to complete an educational scavenger hunt. I did well, but that's in part because my teachers didn't ask me to find a person of color who wasn't a security guard. Although conversations around race and class in the creative community have progressed since then, you're still more likely to find people of color protecting art than curating it. Many museums try to diversify their workforce through internships and part-time jobs, but these positions depend on employees having external sources of income. Despite seemingly good intentions, the problem hasn't disappeared, only disguised itself.

Case in point: Last spring, 90 employees at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum attempted to unionize. In an article documenting their struggle, published by Hyperallergic, Zachary Small wrote that wages have stagnated for decades, leading employees to take drastic action. In doing a bit of digging on the subject, I found a spreadsheet where employees of various cultural institutions worldwide entered their job titles and salaries. To say the results were grim would be an understatement.

It's not that people shouldn't protect art, or that working as a curator is the only position of value. The problem comes when we ignore the hundreds of people who make museums possible, refusing to value all of them as human beings, and keep taking selfies, pretending we can't see the toll it takes.

Security guards and their supporters announce the Art Workers Union outside Seattle's Frye Art Museum in June.

Faith-Marie Zamblé is an artist, writer, and M.F.A. candidate in dramaturgy and dramatic criticism at the Yale School of Drama.



**THUS PRISCA BECAME PART
OF THE JESUS MOVEMENT
FROM THE BEGINNING.**

after her adoptive mother and given Roman citizenship. The elder Priscilla was a Jewish adherent, so devout that she traveled to Jerusalem for the feast of Shavuot (in Greek, “Pentecost”), taking her adopted teenage daughter with her. By coincidence, the festival that year ushered in the descent of the Spirit and the birth of the church. Thus Prisca became part of the Jesus movement from the beginning.

Having studied Roman history, I am impressed by the details Witherington includes. Every possible reference from the New Testament (and a few extracanonical sources) are woven together in this politico-cultural context to round out characters Prisca would have known personally or heard about through her many contacts.

But Witherington also makes choices some scholars would question. Prisca must be 80 years old to cover this historical distance, but very few women in that place and time lived that long. Other details may also raise eyebrows:

1) Witherington has the gospel writer Luke travel with Paul. (While this assertion exists in tradition, it is disputed by many scholars.) 2) When Paul arrives

in Rome in chains (Acts 28:16, 30), he is placed under house arrest *in Prisca and her husband’s home!* (This seems highly unlikely in Nero’s Rome.) 3) While there, Paul writes letters we call Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon. (Because of geographical distance, Philippians and Philemon were likely written during earlier incarcerations, and Paul probably did not write Ephesians.) 4) Paul is later freed and goes to Spain, where he writes to Timothy and Titus. (Most scholars assume Paul was executed after his house arrest and did not write 1 Timothy and Titus.)

Nevertheless, I recommend *Priscilla* for its writing style, creativity, historical research, and focus on a worthy church leader. We misunderstand much when we read our scriptures “on the flat” without the cultural depth they deserve. ✕

Reta Halteman Finger, author of *Creating a Scene in Corinth*, is a New Testament scholar and a *Sojourners* contributing editor. Read more of her Bible studies at eewc.com/RetasReflections.

A FIRST CENTURY LEADER

Priscilla: The Life of an Early Christian,
by Ben Witherington III

IVP Academic

The novel begins with a nightmare from the 10th year of Nero’s reign, 64 C.E. “Rome was burning, would not stop burning ... the screams of adults and children, burning.”

Priscilla, or Prisca, is just waking up from a bad dream. An early Christian believer from “Roma,” wife of Aquila, a leatherworker like “Paulus,” and a house church leader (Acts 18:18-28; Romans 16:3-5; 1 Corinthians 16:19), Prisca is now a widow with an adopted daughter. The nightmare encourages her to record her life story.

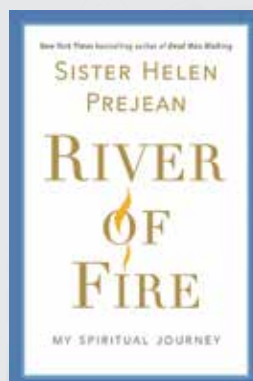
Author Ben Witherington III is a professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary and a prolific writer. With his imagination, New Testament mentions of Prisca, and knowledge of the culture and politics of the Roman Empire, Witherington creates a dramatic account of the first century church, as told by an early leader.

He first portrays Prisca as a young freedwoman adopted by her childless mistress. She is named Priscilla

HOW SISTER HELEN GOT WOKE

River of Fire:
My Spiritual Journey,
by Sister Helen Prejean

Random House



T

The final words of Sister Helen Prejean's new book *River of Fire* are the first lines of her most famous book, *Dead Man Walking*. But it is a different Prejean we meet in the *River* pages: Not the heroic anti-death penalty activist we hear on the news, but a young Louisiana

woman on fire for God.

Raised in a loving Catholic family, Prejean entered the novitiate in the strict 1950s. Her descriptions of almost military-like training—no friendships allowed, eyes modestly downcast, sinners wearing vices written on cards around their necks—made me grateful I never became a nun. Once Prejean took her final vows, however, she only had a few years to adjust to the restrictive life before the Catholic Church experienced the seismic shift of the Second Vatican Council.

Prejean makes this transformative time come alive, even relaying how two men almost came to blows over the changes at a parish discussion group she facilitated. Vatican II meant no more Latin Mass or memorization of the catechism. Catholics were now expected to be truly educated about their faith and motivated more by love than fear. It also meant more freedom for nuns such as Prejean. At a conference on Vatican II, she fell in love with a priest. For some years, they explored the “third way,” having a romantic relationship that’s not consummated, before Prejean ended the relationship.

The most striking aspect of the book is not this clandestine romance but Prejean’s opposition through the 1970s to “in-your-face activist nuns,” the very type of nun she is accused of being today. Prejean believed in prayer and charity alone, that it wasn’t for nuns to try to make heaven on earth.

For the first half of her life, she served only middle-class white communities, blissfully ignorant of systemic racism. She believed that it was God’s will that some people be poor. Through a fellow sister’s powerful teaching, however, she came to understand that Jesus’ good news actually empowered the poor in their struggle for justice, and that

her prayers and charity weren’t doing one iota to help.

She writes, “In a democracy like the United States, there’s no such thing as being apolitical. If we sit back and do nothing, leaving all the policy making to others, that is, in fact, a position of support for the status quo, which is a very political stance to take.”

If Prejean could spend the first 40 years of her life ensconced in white privilege, then change so greatly as to take on one of the mostly racially oppressive systems in the United States, there’s a chance for the rest of us. Maybe conversion is ahead for us all. *River of Fire* gave me hope. ♦

Emilie Haertsch writes memoir and essays about culture, politics, religion, motherhood, and books. She co-hosts the classic movies podcast *The Screen Sirens* and works at the interfaith justice organization POWER.

**“IN A DEMOCRACY LIKE
THE UNITED STATES,
THERE’S NO SUCH THING
AS BEING APOLITICAL.”**

KEEP TO THE PATH

Romans Disarmed:
Resisting Empire,
Demanding Justice,
by Sylvia C. Keesmaat
and Brian J. Walsh

Brazos Press

For many of us, Romans is the most comforting and infuriating book of scripture. We rest easy in God's grace in chapters three through five and the assurance that all will be well in chapter eight. But we chafe at chapter one's exclusion of certain people and chapter 13's apparent baptism of worldly power.

Sylvia C. Keesmaat and Brian J. Walsh are here to help. In their book *Romans Disarmed: Resisting Empire, Demanding Justice*, they read Paul's letter through the lens of homemaking. All the discipline and love of the letter centers on God's people making a home in the center of a home-breaking empire, and on God's invitation to humanity to come home to God. Following the strategy of their book *Colossians Remixed*, Keesmaat and Walsh paraphrase passages of Romans to clarify its application to readers' lives, and provide a fictional account of how two members of the ancient Roman congregation received the letter.

Wait a minute. They include fiction in nonfiction?

Yes, and here's the most noticeable interpretive move they make: inserting questions and comments from an artificial, skeptical dialogue partner.

So they made up old characters to talk about first century Roman culture and a modern voice to bounce their ideas off of? That doesn't seem very reliable.

Well, they say that all the skeptical questions and comments come from reactions they've heard as they've taught this material over the years. They're aiming for "an embodied reading of Romans." But the body looks a little photoshopped.

You sound skeptical, too.

I am. *Colossians Remixed* is a more satisfying look into a biblical letter, as it dove into every part of Colossians. Romans is too big a bite to chew. And their focus on home feels like a retread of Steven Bouma-Prediger and Walsh's book *Beyond Homelessness*. Still, I recommend *Romans Disarmed* to those who fear Romans, having heard it taught as an attack on their politics or identity. To them, Keesmaat and Walsh can be guides. Keep to the path, and they will lead you home to God. ♦

Andy Singleterry is co-leader of the Servant Partners' site in San Jose, Calif., and publisher of Servant Partners Press.

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Poetry

THE DRYAD OF GETHSEMANE SPEAKS TO MARY MAGDALENE ON THE EVENING OF HOLY SATURDAY

By Holly Wells

I can tell from the way
they are staring at shadows on the ground
that the voice-bearers have come
from that place where
trees are not life-giving.

Two nights ago, One was here with them
Whose longing, love, and pain woke my soul,
deep-buried,
which sleeps through winter,
moth-like.

He is not here with them now.

I am awake
because I know
what the voice-bearers do not.

"You come here, but you will not look up.
You cannot see while you are looking down," I say.

Apparently they cannot hear either.

"The broken whispers of leaves
lift you beyond this thin veil of earth,"
I keep speaking,
alive with moonrise.
I was not awakened to be silent.

The voice-bearers' backs are still bent with illusive burdens.

"Look up, look up, look up.
From seeds swallowed dead, trees rise holy.
Roots reach deep and branches high."

A weeping woman among them lifts her head.

"Ah, yes, you too are awake,"
I say through the wind and the fallen light, pushing away time.
"You will see, and
you will not be wrong
when you call Him Gardener."

She is struck breathless,
for a moment washed in starlight,
until she forgets
the shadows are untrue.
But soon she will know
all that is real is in a glimpse
of moonlight tangled in trees.



Holly Wells has a master's degree in English literature from Mississippi College and taught at Hinds Community College in Raymond, Miss.

A gift to inspire and inform.

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SOJOURNERS

ONE MEMORABLE SPRING IN JERUSALEM

Scripture passages
are from the Revised
Common Lectionary,
Cycle A.

By Reta Halteman Finger



Living the Word

Our lectionary reflections for April encompass Palm Sunday and three weeks of readings for Easter. I found these scriptures deeply moving as they presented Jesus of Nazareth through

different eyes and in different contexts.

One spring many years ago, our small Mennonite church near Chicago centered our worship services from Easter to Pentecost on stories of Jesus' resurrection. It was my first experience of "Eastertide," and I never forgot it. Each week we focused on a different resurrection account in the New Testament—one from each gospel (two from Luke) and 1 Corinthians 15. Comparing different perspectives, our services highlighted the many witnesses to a singular, unexpected event that can help convince us today that this crucified prophet has been resurrected and exalted as Messiah and Lord (see Philippians 2:9-11).

Two more thoughts: First, in the passages below we unfortunately miss the terrifying events after Palm Sunday, during which Jesus confronts the Powers—both high-priestly and Roman—that want to get rid of this "King of the Jews." Jesus was crucified as a political threat. To accept the risen Jesus as Lord is to take on the (often political) struggle between good and evil in our current contexts.

Second, our faith is not just spiritual. Jesus' bodily resurrection speaks of the value God places on physical bodies. Though Jesus was black-haired and brown-skinned, God loves all shades and shapes of bodies. Through Jesus' resurrection, we catch a glimpse of the age to come. It may indeed be, as C.S. Lewis characterizes the new Narnia, deeper and more solid than our present age.

Reta Halteman Finger, author of *Creating a Scene in Corinth*, is a New Testament scholar and a *Sojourners* contributing editor. Read more of her Bible studies at eewc.com/RetasReflections.

DO YOU BELIEVE IN THE BODILY RESURRECTION OF JESUS?

APRIL 5

A RISKY DONKEY RIDE

ISAIAH 50:4-9; PSALM 118:1-2, 19-29;
PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11; MATTHEW 21:1-11

About 40 years after the original "Palm Sunday" in Jerusalem, the Jewish historian Josephus wrote a history called *The Wars of the Jews*. In it, he described the welcome received by the Roman Emperor Vespasian when he returned to Rome after destroying Jerusalem and its temple.

The Romans were so fired up that many exited the city to meet him: "The whole multitude ... came into the road and waited for him there." With great joy, "they styled him their Benefactor and Savior."

In contrast, Jesus' "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem parodies the ancient tradition of a victorious king welcomed home to his city after a battle. Rather than riding a white horse, the Middle Eastern Jesus borrows a donkey (Matthew 21:2). Although a large crowd of outsiders created a path for him with cloaks and branches, Jerusalem's citizens have one startled response: "Who is this?" (verses 8, 10). But even his followers do not call him a king; he is "the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee" (verse 11).

Rather than a victorious welcome such as Vespasian received, Jesus knows he is raising the stakes in a land as sharply divided as our own. He must nonviolently challenge the corruption that lies at the core of its leadership—Caiaphas and other chief priests who negotiate with Rome for their own interests. Jesus of Nazareth knows his dramatic action will likely result in his execution, but to honor God, he must take the risk.

Only after these Jerusalem events can the "daughter of Zion" go back to her scriptures and find texts such as Zechariah 9:9 where "your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey" (Matthew 21:5). Or the song of victory in Psalm 118: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord ... bind the festal procession with branches!" (verses 26-27).

Later believers can sing a hymn to their Messiah Jesus (in Philippians 2:6-11), who had “humbled himself to the point of death” and then became exalted above every other human as Lord.

APRIL 12

INTIMATE ENCOUNTER

ACTS 10:34-43; PSALM 118:14-24;
COLOSSIANS 3:1-4; JOHN 20:1-18

Unless you have walked with Jesus during this tumultuous week of a memorial supper, a night’s struggle with fierce temptation, an arrest, two trials, and an excruciating execution, you cannot appreciate the wonder of this Johannine resurrection. Women feature prominently in all resurrection accounts in the gospels, but this touching encounter of Mary Magdalene with Jesus is my favorite.

I have often wondered what clothes the risen Jesus would have worn coming out of the tomb. His graveclothes were carefully left behind. What did he put on?

Between the lines, I read a solution. Before anyone had arrived, Jesus must have found the gardener’s shed, with an old tunic among the tools. No wonder Mary thought he was the gardener (verse 15)!

Hearing her teacher call her name, Mary doesn’t care about worn clothes. In this moment, Jesus’ prophecy from John 10 is fulfilled: The Good Shepherd “calls his own sheep by name” and “the sheep hear his voice” (verse 3). He finally must tell Mary not to “cling” to him.

This intimate encounter makes me wonder if many sources behind the fourth gospel came from women. They figure prominently throughout this narrative, and Jesus frequently takes on “women’s work” of feeding people or washing their feet. Long ago I read that teenage girls were often shepherds in that culture.

However, only men could preach publicly. Elsewhere, we find Peter doing something he never would have imagined—preaching the resurrection to the household of a gentile Roman centurion! What miracle did it take for the Jewish Peter to open his sermon (Acts 10:34) in the presence of a leader of the occupying army with “God shows no partiality”!

What’s your favorite resurrection story? What kind of resurrection God do you worship?

APRIL 19

VALUING THE BODY

ACTS 2:14, 22-32; PSALM 16;
1 PETER 1:3-9; JOHN 20:19-31

Although biblical writers never speak of bodily resurrection before 200 B.C.E., we find hints of a longing for life everlasting in poetry such as Psalm 16, attributed to David. “You do not give me up to Sheol or let your faithful one see the pit” (verse 10). Jews of Jesus’ day assumed a general bodily resurrection only at the end of time (see Daniel 12:1-3).

Seven weeks after Passover, Peter’s Pentecost sermon must have shocked his audience when he used that very psalm to announce that a descendant of David—the one they had crucified, no less—had risen from his tomb! But Peter cannot present the physical evidence, for Acts 1:9 records Jesus’ ascension to heaven. We must turn to John 20 for that demonstration.

Many Christians today do not seem to believe in bodily resurrection. At funerals, I often hear condolences about the soul or spirit of the deceased “going to heaven” or already with Jesus. But John 20 tells a different story.

The risen Jesus asked Mary Magdalene not to hold fast to him, implying she had rushed to her embodied “Rabbouni” with arms wide open (John 20:16). Later the same day, Jesus visits a group of disciples in a locked house. He proves his identity by showing them his hands and side torn by Roman weapons (verses 19-20). A week later, with Thomas now present, Jesus points to his scars and asks Thomas to touch them (verse 27). To me, this looks like bodily resurrection! Our Creator God must highly value our physical bodies of all shapes, colors, and genders.

**THE RISEN JESUS
TELLS MARY MAGDALENE
NOT TO “CLING”
TO HIM.**

APRIL 26

READING BACKWARD?

ACTS 2:14, 36-41; PSALM 116:1-4,
12-19; 1 PETER 1:17-23; LUKE 24:13-35

That spring, Jerusalem didn’t need social media to get the word out. In twos and threes and roomfuls, people were absorbing an impossible fact: The prophet Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and buried, was now alive—walking, talking, and bearing scars of mortal wounds on his body.

The city itself buzzed with the news! Cleopas and (probably) his wife were walking home to Emmaus, trying to figure out what was true and what was fake news (Luke 24:13). They were overtaken by a stranger who knew his scriptures front to back. Oddly, he used these scriptures to explain last weekend’s events (verses 30-31). But it was not until he was invited for supper that the pieces fell into place. The rabbi took the bread, blessed it, and broke it—and in that familiar act they saw his wounded hands.

All four readings for this Sunday invite reflection on how the past and present can only be understood as an intertwined whole. The disciples and scripture writers were beginning to weave together the person of Jesus, now raised from the dead, with the longed-for Messiah of the Hebrew Bible.

Psalm 116 reads like someone recovering from a serious illness, but it could have been Jesus’ first prayer after waking from death. Peter’s Pentecost sermon in Acts 2 is peppered with quotations from the prophet Joel, psalms of David, and 2 Samuel—evidence of the disciples’ intense scripture study over those seven weeks.

Years later, the letter of 1 Peter is addressed to exiles living in five provinces of the Roman Empire. They are marginalized, suffering people who have fled from their native villages and are living as insecurely as refugees and undocumented immigrants today. Amid many assurances of their high spiritual status, Peter makes this extravagant statement: “[Christ] was destined *before the foundation of the world* but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake” (1 Peter 1:20 in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*). ❧

“Preaching the Word,” Sojourners’ online resource for Bible study and sermon preparation, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

H'rumps



A HEARTBEAT AWAY FROM A HOT DOG

By Ed Spivey Jr.

What better moment to have a medical stress test than during this most stressful of times. Yes, there have been other stressful periods in our nation's history. For our "greatest generation," it was Pearl Harbor. For their children, it was the last episode of *Seinfeld*. (Yes, we're shallow, but it's not our fault. We baby boomers were over-loved by the greatest generation. So shame on *them*!)

But nothing compares to living on the brink of war, with a planet on fire, and no confidence in our leadership (especially after my sweet dream about President Martin Sheen). These days, one wonders why stress tests are given in a medical office when mine could just be in the kitchen, where physicians could simply monitor me as I read the morning newspaper. An EKG tracking my rage sweats before I get to the sports page could be useful in determining a treatment plan, which should include at least switching to a monthly newspaper subscription, if there is such a thing.

But when, in the course of human events, you get chest pains, you do what the doctor tells you. Which is get on a treadmill. It seems odd that, in this age of technological innovation, such a crude and simple contraption still provides the best window into one's cardiological health. And the doctor's procedures are similarly tedious and unchanged. I start walking at a comfortable pace, then the doctor increases the speed, then a little more, and a little more. Then the angle is increased, then a little more, until I'm gasping for breath and convinced of one thing: This doctor is trying to kill me.

**IF ONLY A TREADMILL WOULD
MAKE THE WORLD STOP SPINNING.**

While soothingly repeating "Okay, just another minute," it's obvious she wants to establish a baseline for my risk of heart attack by giving me one. Then, presumably, she'd say, "Okay, just before THAT is when we should have stopped. So let that be a lesson to you. [CLEAR!] You should only exercise until you feel tired. [Wait, which of these buttons do I push? Is it this one? SwooooooshJOLT!!!!] After all, you can't take chances with your health."

Of course, dying on the treadmill would mean a lot of paperwork for the medical staff, so they don't want you to succumb on the premises. In the Lyft on the way home, maybe, which would be a different matter and really none of their business.

But it turned out my chest pains were stomach-related, and that I'm actually in good heart health. So I celebrated with two half-smokes at the nearby hot dog stand. With its delicious near-meat byproducts, this small business represents the all-important second opinion to the lifestyle advice inside the medical building next door. It's a reminder that, even in this deeply troubled time, there are two sides to every story. And comfort food might just be the best antidote to daily moments of stress.

Our president telling his umpteenth lie? Eat a cheeseburger. Mitch McConnell installing another woefully unqualified jurist to the federal bench? A tub of cookie dough would be perfect. My granddaughter walking on the handrail of the back deck and—deeming the degree of difficulty insufficient—doing it with her eyes closed? Two words: more bacon.

But even the best of food favorites can't dull my rage at the most stressful aspect of our modern age. Despite the big bowl of goldfish crackers in my lap, I can NOT "listen to the entire message because our menu has changed." In this chaotic world, there's at least *one* thing I can control. Right? ♦

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of *Sojourners* magazine.

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